

Story 1421 (1976 Tape 31) Narrator: Ali Çiftçi, farmer;
c. 60 in mid-1970's

Location: Çıkırıkçı village,
Sarıkaya kaza,
Yozgat Province

Date: 1976

Religious Solution Provided by Child

A message was once sent from England to one of the Ottoman padishahs. It said, "Your mosques are repaired frequently, whereas our churches last forever and require no repairs. We request an explanation of this difference
padishah met with his şeyhülislam¹ in order to find some answer to this query, but they were unable to find one. The padishah then called his grand vizier to his presence and said, "Travel around Turkey until you have found someone who can provide an answer to this problem."²

¹The highest religious figure in the Ottoman government. The office still exists, but it no longer has any political power; it regulates the hours of prayer services and the times of religious holidays.

²It is fanciful to suggest that governments demanded of each other the solving of puzzles or riddles, but this motif is common in Turkish folktales. Sometimes it is a pretext for military invasion, the challenger declaring that the challenged country will be attacked unless an answer is forthcoming. Shrewd youth attain fame by providing the correct answers.

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The vizier traveled around for some time but was not able to find an answer to this problem. Then he arrived at the place which is now called Kayseri. Near what is now the railroad station there used to be a place called Kūmbet³ Meadow in which there was a cemetery. There was a road going past that cemetery which led to the market. Some children had established the likeness of a government there. One of them stood at the head of the road as a guard to prevent anyone from passing through. When the vizier, together with his servant, reached that place, the child guard said, "Sir, you cannot pass beyond this point. It is forbidden

"Why?" asked the vizier

"We have established a government here, and our prime minister declared that passage beyond this point is forbidden

"Tell your prime minister that we have arrived here ask him for permission for us to continue on our way, said the grand vizier

When this was reported to the prime minister, he

³Kūmbet means vault or dome, and by extension it may refer to small burial vaults.

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said, "Let them come here to me." Then he gave an order to another member of his staff: "Go and tell my mother and father that their son is going to have an important guest. Tell them to prepare the house for this visitor."

The boy given that order ran to the prime minister's house and said, "Mother, your son sends his greeting. He has an important guest coming here, and he requests you prepare the house suitably."

The father scolded this child messenger: "Go away, now! Who is he to have an important guest?"

But the mother intervened, saying privately to child, "Never mind him! He is not feeling well today. Tell my son that the house will be ready

Although no one there knew who he was, the grand vizier was accepted as a guest in the home of the young prime minister. During dinner the guest said very little and seemed to be lost in thought. The boy's father asked, "O guest, are you not feeling well? Is something wrong? You seem to be thinking very deeply.

The vizier answered, "There is nothing wrong, and I am feeling quite well. However, I do have a problem. We in this country have received a message from England

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which says the following: 'Our churches remain without need of repair for long periods of time, but your mosques are frequently in need of repair. Why is this?' They demand an explanation. The padishah and the seyhülislam met to prepare an explanation, but they were unable to do so. I am now looking everywhere for an answer."

The boy prime minister was standing by the door at that moment, and he heard the vizier's remarks. He said, "Sir, I can provide a solution."

His father was annoyed by this and demanded, "Who are you to solve this problem?"

But the guest said to the father, "I am the padishah's grand vizier. Let the boy provide an answer if he can. Then, turning to the boy, the vizier said, "Come now, son! Give me your explanation."

"I shall give it at the place where an English church is located."

"Very well," said the vizier.

In the morning they bade farewell to the boy's parents, and then the vizier, the boy, and the vizier's servant set out for İstanbul. When they arrived there and were shown into the presence of the ruler, the vizier said

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"My padishah, I have found the person who can solve our problem

The padishah called the seyhülislam to his side, and then he spoke to the boy: "Very well, son. Give me your answer to this problem."

"No, your majesty. In order to give my answer, I must go to England and visit a church there."

They took him to a church. Before he went inside the church, he took ablutions in the fountain.⁴ Inside the church, he turned in the direction of Mecca and touched his ear with his hand.⁵ Then he shouted, "Allahuekber!"⁶ As soon as he said that, a portion of one wall collapsed. Going before another wall, he again shouted, "Allahuekber!" and part of that wall collapsed.

⁴Because there are always several water taps or "fountains" before a mosque to allow worshipers to take their ritual ablutions, the narrator mistakenly assumes that there are similar facilities before every Christian church.

⁵A gesture made by each worshiper at the beginning of a Moslem prayer service. Some feel that it symbolizes readiness for communication with the Divine.

⁶Allah is omnipotent, the opening words of the Moslem prayer service.

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"Enough! Enough!" said his hosts. "Stop, or will bring down the whole church!"

"Infidels!" said the boy. "There is neither the name of Allah nor of the Prophet uttered at any time in church Allah's name is repeated frequently five times a day in every mosque. Who can resist the power of Allah?"

The Turkish delegation took the child and returned home. He had provided an answer to the message which had come from England to the padishah.